

Returning education to the common: reckoning together in contemporary schooling¹

Devolver la educación a lo común: echando cuentas juntos en la escuela contemporánea

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Abstract

This article addresses directly the issue of how we might consider what counts in contemporary schooling; of how we go about working out together what counts for us. This will, in turn, open up possibilities for seeing the practices of teaching and learning as making a contribution to the construction of common goods. It begins from the etymology of “to count”. From the Latin *computare*, it is imbued with a sense of calculating or enumerating (such as results, grades, league table position etc in the context of schooling). But there is another sense of the verb which also suggests a “reckoning among”, or “reckoning together”. To “count” is, therefore, also strongly related to ideas of “judging or considering along with others”. In further exploring how we work out together what counts in education, the article turns to the work of the American philosopher, Stanley Cavell, and to his explorations of criteria and judgement in the opening chapter of his seminal work *The Claim of Reason* (1979). In discussing Wittgensteinian criteria in language, and of what, for Wittgenstein, “counted” as something, Cavell notes that Wittgenstein’s source of authority is always the “we” (the community of language users); it is always the “we” who establish the criteria under

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investigation. Cavell proceeds from this discussion to examine the formula: “We say” in appeals to ordinary language. In saying this, argues Cavell, we are issuing an invitation to the other to see if they can accept what we say, or the way we see things. The fact that we do this *together* signals our membership of a polis: “Our search for criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community” (Cavell, 1979, p. 20). To work out what counts for us – through reckoning together – is the way that I “discover my position with respect to these facts” (ibid., p. 25). The article argues that to offer this invitation to others see things the way we see them (to consent in criteria) – or, conversely, to dissent in criteria – is a pedagogical moment. In the context of education, it can be a practice – rooted in dialogical approaches – that ruptures a transmission model of education and the precedence of outcomes. To accept the invitation to talk together, and to consider to what we can give our consent (and from what we must dissent), is a way of realising the democratising promises of education that has profound implications for pedagogy as well as for the construction of common goods.

Key words: community, criteria, common, Cavell, proclaim, return, counts, attunement, consent.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda directamente la cuestión de cómo podemos considerar lo que cuenta en la escuela contemporánea; de cómo vamos a definir lo que cuenta para nosotros. Esto, a su vez, abrirá las posibilidades de ver las prácticas de enseñanza y aprendizaje como una contribución a la construcción de bienes comunes. Partimos de la etimología de “contar”. Del latín *computare*, está impregnada de un sentido de cálculo o enumeración (como los resultados, las calificaciones, la posición en la tabla clasificatoria, etc. en el contexto de la escuela). Pero hay otro sentido del verbo que también sugiere un “considerar con” o “considerar conjuntamente”. Por lo tanto, “contar” también está fuertemente relacionado con las ideas de “juzgar o considerar junto a otros”. Para seguir explorando cómo definimos juntos lo que cuenta en la educación, el artículo recurre a la obra del filósofo estadounidense Stanley Cavell y a sus exploraciones de los criterios y el juicio en el capítulo inicial de su obra cumbre *Reivindicaciones de la razón* (1979). Al hablar de los criterios wittgensteinianos en el lenguaje, y de lo que, para Wittgenstein, “contaba” como algo, Cavell señala que la fuente de autoridad de Wittgenstein es siempre el “nosotros” (la comunidad de usuarios del lenguaje); es siempre el “nosotros” quien establece los criterios investigados. Cavell parte de esta discusión para examinar la fórmula: “Decimos” en apelación al lenguaje ordinario. Al decir esto, argumenta Cavell, estamos lanzando una invitación al otro para ver si puede aceptar lo que decimos, o la forma en que vemos las cosas. El hecho de que lo hagamos *juntos* señala nuestra pertenencia

a una polis: Nuestra búsqueda de criterios en base a los cuales decimos lo que decimos, son reivindicaciones a la comunidad” (Cavell, 1979, p. 20). Definir lo que cuenta para nosotros (echando cuentas de manera conjunta) es la forma en que descubro mi posición con respecto a estos hechos” (ibid., p. 25). El artículo defiende que ofrecer esta invitación a que otros vean las cosas como nosotros las vemos (consentir en los criterios) –o, a la inversa, disentir en los criterios– es un momento pedagógico. En el contexto de la educación, puede ser una práctica, enraizada en enfoques dialógicos, que rompe el modelo de transmisión de la educación y la precedencia de los resultados. Aceptar la invitación a dialogar juntos, y considerar a qué podemos dar nuestro consentimiento (y de qué debemos disentir), es una forma de hacer realidad las promesas democratizadoras de la educación que tiene profundas implicaciones para la pedagogía, así como para la construcción de bienes comunes.

Palabras clave: comunidad, criterios, común, Cavell, proclamación, devolver, cuenta, sintonización, consentimiento.

Introduction

In 1996, American politician, and later US presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, published a book, *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (Clinton, 1996). The volume presented her vision for the children of America, and advocated a society which meets all of a child’s needs. The title clearly referenced the African proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child”. Commonly thought to have origins in, and variants from, different parts of Africa, the proverb has been over-used to the point of cliché. However, what it suggests is a broader, and crucial, debate about the public dimensions of education in contemporary society. It raises important practical, yet also profoundly philosophical, questions: What are (or should be) the aims of schooling? Who is school for? What matters for the school - and so what is taught and how should it be taught? And perhaps most importantly, what should be the relationship between central or local government, communities, and schools? These questions also open onto further concerns relating to how pupils and teachers are situated within the school system because of what is seen to (or mandated to) matter in these institutions. What underlies these concerns

is first, how the contemporary school might exist in the public sphere as a space for opportunity and quest for common goods; second, how this quest has been frustrated by the rise of modes of governance in which private interests and regimes of regulation have come to dominate.

Schools are at the heart of their communities. Their mission statements are full of laudable aims that are often founded on ideas of “community”: of a being an inclusive community of pupils, teachers, parents and governors, or of being physical hub in the neighbourhood which serves a local community. We might think that idea of the English community school is founded on these kinds of principle (and that in this sense, there is something of the idea of the village raising the child inherent in it). But the language is perhaps misleading here. The idea of the “community school” is not akin to the idea of the community shop or library where local people pitch in to lead and run services for the benefit of the public. A community school in England is controlled by the Local Authority which owns the land and buildings, employs staff and determines admission arrangements. Such schools have little control over what is taught, and as such, follow the English National Curriculum. Alongside the decline in the number of such schools², there has been a concomitant rise in the number of academies - independent schools which can be set up by business sponsors, but accountable through a legally binding funding agreement with central government.

What counts in contemporary schooling?

Given the changing nature of the organisation and ethos of many schools – particularly in the English context – in what sense can our schools still be said to be “communities”? From the Latin *communis*, we get the everyday sense that modern word “community” is rooted in ideas of the common, public, or of something shared by others.³ As communities, schools do share in common what counts for them, often expressed in

² The Department for Education report that in 2019 there were 24,323 schools in England, but that only 25% of secondary schools, and 68% of primary schools were in the control of, and maintained by, the Local Authority, Community schools are included in these figures. See DfE (2019).

³ While this is one understanding of the word that can be drawn from its etymological roots, the paper will, in subsequent sections, draw on others, especially those highlighted in the work of Robert Esposito (2009).

their mottoes, mission statements: aspiration; learning together; respect for each other; collaboration and partnership; inclusion and equity for all. But what counts is not simply a matter of schools articulating their vision and values – of establishing and sustaining communities through practices that vivify their mission. What counts is now not the result of what is shared in common across school communities *as determined by them*, but rather is circumscribed by central government. Increasingly the statutory schools” sector is subject to modes of governance that not only determine *what* counts, but also legislate, inspect, and regulate in order to secure it.

Understanding what counts in contemporary schooling takes little effort; the dominance of what I call the discourses of “counting and accounting” are thinly veiled, despite the much-vaunted policies of academisation in the sector with its promises of increased budgetary freedom, curricular flexibility and increased scope for the procurement of services. What counts is often linked with what can be easily measured, compared in league tables or evidenced through different inspection and regulation processes. Pupil outcomes – especially in seen in measures of attainment – count. That learning, evidenced through progress and attainment measures, counts for central government, is the driving force behind current moves to assess and address learning loss as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Education Policy Institute, 2021). Attainment counts too in terms of public examinations, and the pressures on schools to improve pass rates in the school leaving exams in order to meet accountability measures, and to secure position on national league tables (Taylor, 2016). Pupils themselves feel the pressure of what counts in terms of attainment, whether it is as primary-aged pupils facing standardised tests (Connor, 2003; Howard, 2020), the negative effects of tiering based on potential for performance (Barrance, 2020), or secondary pupils facing public examinations and the stress of performance (Roome and Soan, 2019).

The fact that pupil outcomes and attainment count to such an extent makes sense of other regulatory, and accountability measures in schools. In order to secure pupil attainment, pedagogical practices – and even the curriculum itself – need to be carefully directed, and behaviour must be closely managed to maximise pupil progress. All this is critical if education is to produce the highly skilled citizens who will contribute to the economic development of the country and its success among its

competitors on the world stage. In this culture, what counts is ineluctably linked to what counts for the national prosperity. And this is a global issue. In 2018, for example, the Nigerian government instigated a series of public school reforms title “Every Child Counts.” While this suggests a broad commitment to public school reform for the benefit of children and young people, its motivation and emphasis is perhaps better understood in its rationale: equipping Nigerian youths to be productive with a skill-based curriculum – prioritising science and technology – to help eradicate poverty from the nation.⁴ What such initiatives suggest is that what counts in schooling has shifted to serve political and economic needs in an increasingly competitive global market.

The pressures that these kinds of enumeration exercises exert has led to different forms of resistance and response. One pertinent example is that of the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) which has brought together community and grass roots organisations to “reclaim the promise of public education as...[a] gateway to strong democracy and racial and economic justice”, and to “unite parents, youth, teachers and unions to drive the transformation of public education, shift the public debate and build a national movement for equity and opportunity for all”.⁵ Another is that of the system of democratic schools in Poland, initiated in 2013 as schools set up by parents dissatisfied with the mainstream education system, and offering an alternative learning environment “free from the perceived shortcomings of public schooling” (Galwocz and Starnawski, 2020, p. 17916).

What it means to count

From the Old French *conter*, counting is etymologically related to enumerating, adding or summing up, and in the idea of assigning numerals to things.⁶ We see strong lines of connection between such ideas and what counts in schools (grades, examination passes etc). But there is another sense of the verb “to count” which is rooted in the Latin *computare*. From *com* – with, and *putare* – to reckon, we understand

⁴ See <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/293506-nigeria-adopts-every-child-counts-education-policy-osinbajo.html> Accessed 29th March 2021.

⁵ See <http://www.reclaimourschools.org/> Accessed 15th July 2021.

⁶ See <https://www.etymonline.com/word/count> Accessed 29th March 2021.

that to count can also mean to reckon together with (others). This is important, as it links the idea of counting to that of community.

The community is not conceived here as a body of like-minded people who come together – almost as if in an echo-chamber – to lament the state of public schooling. It is rather that, drawing on the etymology in the Latin *com-munus* (where *munus* signifies the burden that we share), we get the sense of community as realised in the challenge of living with others who may be radically different to us. In this sense, we do not participate in a ready-made community, but rather *make* community happen. As Robert Esposito puts it: “Community cannot be thought of as a body... Neither is community to be interpreted as a mutual, intersubjective “recognition” in which individuals are reflected in each other so as to confirm their initial identity; as a collective bond that comes at a certain point to connect individuals that before were separate” (2009, p. 7).

What Esposito highlights here is that the *munus* that the *communitas* shares is not easily thought of in terms of something that is possessed, but rather that it is a “debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given... The subjects of community are united by an “obligation” (Esposito, 2009, p. 6).

In the remainder of this paper, I develop the idea that resistance to the idea of what counts in education (and to the dominant sense of enumerating) can be found in our reckoning together as teachers, pupils, parents, and school communities. The obligation that we owe to the *communitas* is seen in this very idea of reckoning together. Thinking in this way elicits a rupture in a transmission model of education that privileges outcomes, and could help realise the democratising promises of education that has profound implications for pedagogy as well as for the construction of common goods. In developing these ideas, the paper turns, somewhat unusually, to the work of Stanley Cavell, and to his reading of Wittgenstein on criteria. Here I turn in particular to passages from his seminal work, *The Claim of Reason* (Cavell, 1979) to consider the relationship between our reckoning together; our claims to community and the common good(s) of education.

What counts as something? Wittgenstein and Cavell

In the opening chapter of his seminal work, *The Claim of Reason* (1979), Stanley Cavell, by way of introduction, explores how we should approach

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953/1973). He recalls how, for a long time, Wittgenstein's recurrent notion of a criterion had seemed both strange and familiar – a “blur or block” (Cavell, 1979, p. 6). Cavell is at this point interested in Wittgenstein's claims about the sorts of investigations he called grammatical, and particularly the question that is asked in such investigations: “Under what circumstances, or in what particular cases, do we say...?” (Cavell, 1979, p. 30). What we discover, claims Cavell, as a result of these investigations, are our criteria. They establish what kind of an object anything is. For Cavell, Wittgenstein's criteria are “the means by which the existence of something is established with certainty” (*ibid.*, p. 6). In short, they tell us what *counts as* something: “It is this feature of counting something under a concept which Wittgenstein's notion of a criterion is meant to bring out” (Cavell, 1979, p. 35). Perhaps Wittgenstein's most famous case is what counts as pain, and so the criteria for knowing with certainty when another is indeed in pain.

Wittgenstein's notion of a criterion, is, Cavell argues, a very ordinary one; it is also one in which what counts for *us* is foregrounded:

He speaks, for example, of criteria as possessed by certain person or groups of persons (they are “mine” or “ours”); of their being “adopted” or “accepted”; of their forming a “kind of definition”; of there being various criteria for something or other “under certain circumstances”; of their association with “what we call” something; and of their showing what something “consists in” or what “counts as” something” (1979, p. 7).

The concern in Wittgenstein is clearly with establishing certainty in relation to our words. But Cavell's treatment of Wittgensteinian criteria in this first chapter (“Criteria and Judgement”) opens onto a discussion of how criteria and judgment, exercised through our being a member of a *linguistic* community, are extended to what is at stake in our being a member of a *political* community. Indeed, for Wittgenstein, “To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” (1953/1973, §19). Cavell's starting point for this lies again in Wittgenstein. He notes that the source of authority for establishing the criteria under investigation – those which are, for him, the data of philosophy – are always “ours” (1979, p. 18). For Cavell, it is what *we* say that is important here. When, in appeals to our

ordinary language, we use the phrase “When we say...we mean...”, we are issuing to the community of language users “an invitation for you to see whether you have such a sample, or can accept mine as a sound one” (*ibid.*, 19). But there is something further at stake in the idea of the “we” in relation to our criteria. The fact that “we” is grammatically first person, and yet also plural, is, for Cavell, significant. It signals that in saying “When we say... we mean...” we are not only speaking for ourselves, but for others. Others have consented to our speaking for them, and we accept that others speak for us too. Cavell puts it like this: “To speak for oneself politically is to speak for others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them – not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind” (1979, p. 27).

What this shows is that the operation of criteria is ineluctably linked to our political lives. Our being intelligible to each other depends on what Cavell calls “our mutual attunement in judgements” (1979, p. 115). We should not take this to mean that, in making judgements on criteria, we deliberately sit around, discuss together, and eventually come to some kind of democratic agreement where the view of the majority holds – some kind of generalisation. It is rather that, as Cavell point out, there is already in *language* a “background of pervasive and systematic agreements among us” (*ibid.*, p. 30). We do not arrive at agreement; we are rather “in agreement throughout...in harmony” (*ibid.*, p. 32). The “astonishing fact of the astonishing extent to which we *do* agree in judgement” (p. 30) – that we *are* intelligible to each other – shows that our judgements, our criteria and what counts for us as something, are both shared, and are yet also a continuing obligation. This underpins Cavell’s claim that “The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community” (1979, p. 20). The political, then, is at the heart of such claims. This is rooted in the idea that our judging together is “the human capacity for applying the concepts of language to the things of a world” (Cavell, 1979, p. 17). In working our together what counts for us, we reckon together, and we make community. And sometimes this means an encounter with radical otherness; as Esposito puts it, “exposure to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity of the subject” (2009, p. 7).

At the end of Part 1 of the *Claim of Reason*, Cavell imagines some of the questions that a child might ask – “What is God?”; “Who owns the land?”; “Why do we eat animals?” In thinking how to answer these, he feels that he might have run out of reasons, but is reluctant to say that this is simply how things are, or what we do. In such instances, he finds that the way forward for him is to “take the occasion to throw myself back upon my culture, and ask why we do what we do, judge as we judge, how we have arrived at these crossroads” (1979, p. 125). What results from this is described by Cavell as “a convening of my culture’s criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life as I pursue them and as I imagine them; and at the same time... confront[ing] my words and life as I pursue them with the life my culture’s words may imagine for me” (*ibid.*). For Cavell, this kind of task counts as philosophy, but also what we might call education – the “education of grown-ups” (*ibid.*). It is surely also a kind of working out what counts for each of us, and for our culture; it is a reckoning – and a reckoning together. What characterises such reckoning together is change, or, as Cavell puts it “a turning of our natural reactions; so it is symbolized as re-birth” (1979, p. 125).⁷ Our reckoning together reflects not only the ways in which we work out our political lives together, but also the ongoing possibilities for community.

Dissent in criteria

When “we say...”, we offer an invitation to the other to see the world as we see it; to share in a form of life. While Cavell noted the “astonishing fact of the astonishing extent to which we *do* agree”, and that we are mutually attuned, this is not always the case. Sometimes an initial disagreement over criteria can be overcome. We might find that we were not actually talking about the same thing, were imagining a situation differently, or were not considering carefully enough the matter at hand. But what if disagreement persists; if no agreement can be reached? “At such a crossroads”, writes Cavell, we have to conclude that on this point we are simply different; that is, we cannot speak for one another” (Cavell, 1979, p. 19). In saying that we are different, we are claiming that

⁷ Cavell contrasts the natural growth of children with change and conversion for adults – for “grown-ups” (Cavell, 1979, p. 125).

others no longer are able to speak for us. This does not mean that the whole system and background of our agreement in criteria is in some way undone, but rather that there is a dispute, such that the withdrawal of our consent is the result. We no longer recognise that the present arrangement is faithful to what we originally consented. As Cavell puts it: “Dissent is not the undoing of consent, but a dispute about its content, a dispute within over whether a present arrangement is faithful to it” (1979, p. 27).

Cavell claims that in Wittgenstein, criteria are the means by which we learn what kind of object anything is, and the value we assign to it (Cavell, 1979, p. 16). Put another way, it is through criteria that we reckon together what counts as something, and what counts for us (*ibid.*, p. 7). What counts in schooling, as we have seen, is largely the result of claims made *on* school communities. What counts is evident in concerns that tend towards different forms of enumerating, such that league tables can be compiled; comparisons made; interventions planned, and improvement evidenced. The increasingly widespread resistance to such moves in compulsory schooling (and across other sectors such as higher education), signals discontent with the present arrangements. The dispute relates to whether current priorities for curricula, for what it means to be a teacher, a pupil, or an educated person, are faithful to the criterion of schooling to which the community consented. Dissent happens because there is a disappointment with criteria with the criteria as they have been inherited.

Claiming and proclaiming: passionate speech

When our attunement is lost, claims Cavell, we appeal to criteria. We do this when “we don’t know our way about” because “we are lost with respect to our words and the world they anticipate” (1979, p. 34). This is not a state of what we might call a loss of voice (with respect to our criteria) from which there is no recovery. Cavell finds that, in Wittgenstein, there are two senses of judgement in relation to appeals to criteria. The first (the judgements predication) is about determining whether an object counts under the criteria at all. The second (the judgements proclamation) is about saying it out.

In proclaiming, we call attention to what we count as something, and declare our position. This is what it means to have a political voice – to speak with, and on behalf of, others in relation to what is common between us. To pro-claim – to speak forth – in this way, is part of our responsibility not only to the linguistic, but also to the *political* community. To proclaim is to have a voice in those communities, and to test the limits of that voice. Cavell puts in in this way:

We do not know in advance what the content of our mutual acceptance is, how far we may be in agreement. I do not know in advance how deep my agreement with myself is, how far responsibility for the language may run. But if I am to have my voice in it, I must be speaking for others and allow others to speak for me...The alternative is to have nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute (1979, p. 28).

Cavell issues a note of caution, however, that “in the political, the impotence of your voice shows up quickest” (1979, p. 27). We risk rebuff from others, even those for whom we claimed to be speaking, “and that this is likely to be heartbreaking and dangerous” (*ibid.*). In his work, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (2005), Cavell writes about this possibility of rebuff as inherent to his claims for what he calls passionate utterance (2005, p. 155). The development of this idea is set against the background of Austin’s discussion of the force of our words which bears some brief discussion here. Austin traces how utterances have been thought of over time, and identifies two broad movements: one whose focus is on the truth or falsity of constatives – what he calls the “verification movement” – the other concentrating on the “different uses of language” (Austin 1979, p. 234). Austin’s interest, however, lies in those expressions which share a number of particular characteristics. They are relatively straightforward examples, expressed in the first person singular present indicative, and they are plainly not nonsense. One example might be: “I pronounce you husband and wife”.⁸ At first glance other examples, such as Austin’s: “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth” (p. 235), appear to

⁸ For such a performative utterance to be “felicitous”, Austin identifies a number of conditions that must be met. The utterance must take place as part of a conventional procedure where the context and people involved are appropriate; the procedure must be executed completely and in an appropriate fashion; the utterance must be backed by appropriate feelings by the people involved who must conduct themselves accordingly afterwards (1979, p. 237).

be simple statements, and grammatically might be classed as such. But herein lies a problem: for Austin, it is not possible to talk of examples such as these in terms of their being true or false. He goes on to identify their distinctive nature as “performatives” in this way: “If a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is doing something rather than merely saying something...In saying what I do, I actually perform that action ... I am indulging in it” (Austin 1979, p. 235).

Cavell, however, draws attention to what he finds a crisis in Austin’s arguments in that what holds for constative utterances (that they can be thought about in terms of truth or falsity) also holds up for performatives, so collapsing the very distinction that Austin originally set up. Austin then moves towards a discussion of the *force* of utterances, laying aside his earlier binary distinction to introduce a ternary model of the *force* of language: the locutionary force (of saying something meaningful); the illocutionary force (of doing something *in* saying something) and the perlocutionary effect (of doing something *by* saying something). In this ternary model, Austin is less interested in perlocutionary effect than is Cavell. Ian Munday argues that, for Cavell, perlocutions: “open up a new field of enquiry that moves beyond formal constraints and presents an approach to speech that engages with the other. ...Consequently, taking seriously the importance of the perlocutionary effects of language is to acknowledge the individual/expressive uses of speech in which people establish relationships with another (2009, p. 63). So for Cavell, notions of invocation, appeal and, crucially, response, characterise passionate utterance; such utterances are often spoken in the context of an exchange – a reckoning together. It is in this very kind of reckoning together as members of a *polis* that we create community, and in which there is the possibility that we can both claim and reclaim the common goods of schooling.

A passionate utterance, then, is an invitation to a form of conversation, one in which a speaker invokes, or provokes the words of another. The proclamatory moment of passionate utterance is made without knowing its effects: perhaps acceptance, postponement or even rejection, and what the consequences of these might be (consent or dissent). In making our proclamation – in speaking out of passion (and here Cavell simply highlights the emotional in our utterances that he felt were underplayed

in Austin⁹) – we invite an exchange. We also risk rebuff. And the danger of which Cavell warned is evident in his assertion that: “each instance of [the passionate utterance] risks, if not costs blood” (2005: 187). But if the proclamatory moment is one marked by the kind of utterances that Cavell calls passionate, it is also the means by which we “reaffirm the polis” (1979, p. 27). We lay bare our motivations, and commitments, and thereby call attention to what counts for us, to what we have reckoned together.

Ventriloquism and vampirism

The claims that are currently made by government and regulatory bodies *for* (on behalf of) public schooling, especially in terms of what should be the overriding priorities, are claims that made *on* schools. There are connotations of “claim” here that are suggestive of authority, ownership, dominance, and demand. To have a claim on someone (or indeed on an institution) is to assert a right over them. It is to privilege one voice over that of others; to demand the right for one’s voice to be heard (insisted on, affirmed, concurred) and yet not to allow others to speak on your behalf. Where such claims on schooling are not faithful to the criterion of schooling to which the educational community has consented, there is dissonance not attunement. Dissonance is the result not of the limits of knowledge, but, as Cavell claims of experience. “When these limits are reached, claims Cavell, “our attunements are dissonant” (1979, p. 115), and we are out of tune with one another.

In the case of criteria, when we withdraw our consent, we are saying that others can no longer speak for us (and that we can no longer speak for them). But to return to the example of schooling, and to the common in public schooling, there is something different playing out. While the result of the powerful discourses of outcomes, progress, of regulation and of accountability in our schools is that school communities are out

⁹ The implication here is that passionate utterance is not only be expressed by those with a particular relationship marked by moments of high passion: by those who are, for example, lifelong friends, lovers or even sworn enemies. Such relationships could certainly provide the context for individuals to speak out of passion and seek or demand a response from the other. But in fact, this is the stuff of our ordinary lives. What Cavell hints at, though, is a context for passionate utterance where, although perfectly ordinary words may be used (just as in Cavell’s example, “I’m bored”), the perlocutionary effect of the utterance is marked.

of tune with those who regulate them, these bodies still claim to speak for them. It is as if there is *forced* consent in criteria (which of course to Wittgenstein and Cavell is anathema). Cavell has elsewhere – in his writings on 1930s and 1940s Hollywood films of the genre he calls the “melodramas of the unknown woman” – written about the ventriloquism of the feminine voice (Cavell, 1996). He exposes a common thread across these films where the male characters speak for the female such that there is not only ventriloquism taking place,¹⁰ but a kind of “vampirism” (1996, p. 70). These films depict the (female) heroine in a state of voicelessness – of inexpressiveness and therefore of unintelligibility. Take the example of the 1944 film, *Gaslight* directed by George Cukor. Here the heroine, Paula, is rendered voiceless by her murderous husband, Gregory. He speaks for her; refuses to let her meet with friends and acquaintances; persuades her that she is sinking into insanity. Today we might call this coercive control – a pattern of controlling behaviours that create an unequal power dynamic in a relationship.

What is happening in contemporary schooling is clearly far from what is projected on the screen in a film made for entertainment. I am not intending to make any kind of direct comparison here; this would be stretch the illustration way too far. But there is something of a mode of ventriloquism at play in terms of thinking what is common in schooling. This ventriloquism asserts itself in the form of a claim (exercised through different regimes of governance) to speak for others on what counts; to claim to be in attunement (with school communities). This is a perversion of the idea of “we say” (the claim that others can speak for us because we have consented for them to do so). As Cavell writes, this goes beyond ventriloquism to a kind of “possession” or “inhabitation” of the voice of another (1996, p. 61).

The proclamatory moment: Reckoning together

To claim that what is common and public in our schools has been lost in the rise of modes of governance that shift the orientation of the work of teaching away from the pursuit of the common good, and towards regimes dominated by mechanisms of accountability towards political

¹⁰ See also Fulford (2009).

and economic ends, risks claiming that it is also hope that has been lost. It goes beyond recognising a state of voicelessness to suggest that there is no hope for the recovery of voice. But this seems wrong in two ways. First, it might lead to a kind of thinking that there is little left worth holding onto in terms of the pursuit of democratic schooling and the educational task. But this would be to turn away from the kind of claim that Hannah Arendt makes in her celebrated quotation from her essay, “The Crisis in Education”: “Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable” (1954, p. 193).

Second, it misunderstands what it is to dissent (in criteria). Cavell writes that when disagreement persists, there is no appeal beyond ourselves; we are, he writes “simply different” (1979, p. 19). But this is not the end of the matter. Our appeals don’t simply cease; they are the process by which we remain intelligible to each other, and share a form of life. Beyond our appeals to criteria in language, our appeals to criteria for what counts for us as anything – and here, what counts as the common goods of education – are ineluctably related to our continuing to claim, and proclaim, them as ours. Thus the obligation to the making of the community of the school is, to use Cavell’s term, perfectionist.¹¹ Cavell outlines what is at stake in such proclaiming:

To proclaim it here and now you must be willing to call out, (‘claim’) just that predicate on the basis of what you have so far gathered... and you must find it called for on just this occasion, i.e., find yourself willing to come before (‘pro-’) those to whom you speak it (e.g., declare yourself in a position to inform or advise or alert someone of something, or explain or identify or remark something to someone) (1979, p. 35).

¹¹ Cavell finds in the work of the 19th century American Transcendentalist poet and essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson what he terms an idea of Emersonian Moral Perfectionism. He describes this “not a competing theory of the moral life, but something like a dimension or tradition of the moral life that spans the course of Western thought and concerns what used to be called the state of one’s soul, a dimension that places tremendous burdens on personal relationships and on the possibility of necessity of the transforming of oneself and one’s society” (Cavell, 1990, p. 2). In characterising an *idea* as perfectionist, I am drawing attention to that aspect of perfectionism which is to do with partiality and iteration, as exemplified in Emerson’s famous line (from his work, “Circles” that “Around every circle, another can be drawn” – Cavell, 1990, p. xxxiv).

What might this mean in our school communities and for educators in terms of re-claiming the common goods in schools and in our teaching; in terms of re-finding education's place as a common good rather than as a political pawn for economic or political ends? How can we pro-claim what counts for us, in the kind of teaching practices that contribute to the construction of common goods? In *Must We Mean What We Say*, (2002), Cavell writes about the task of "bringing words back home" (p. 62), from their metaphysical, to their ordinary uses. To return our words to the common is also to be thrown back onto them; to experience them anew. There is in this, perhaps, a way of thinking about how we return the idea and practices of *education* to the common, from what might be thought of as its political misuses, to think again about its common goods.

Returning education to the common: ways forward

Returning education to the common is not necessarily a matter of mobilising mass resistance movements to the corrosive influence of performativity and the target-driven culture, of managerialism and competition. Nor is reckoning together is not some kind of naïve antidote to the ills of neoliberal influences in education. Proclaiming and reclaiming will not automatically produce a return to common goods of education, nor will it achieve a setting aside of the regimes of accountability, however desirable those things might appear. Charter schools in the United States (semi-autonomous public schools that receive public funds) set up to operate according to a basic principle of autonomy, could be seen as an example of reclamation, of working to prioritise choice for families and communities, and to realising the common goods of education. They might even be seen in the sense of a "counterpublic" (Fraser, 1997, p. 82), an alternative to the "one-size-fits-all" model of traditional public education (Knight Abowitz, 2001). However, they have been subject to significant criticism, with Garth Stahl claiming that it can be argued that "these schools function as vehicles for behavioural scrutiny and bodily surveillance, shaping the lives and subjectivities of economically disadvantaged students of colour" (2019, p. 1330). But there are ways forward; there is hope for returning education to the common through

moves that can be made both at the political level and the pedagogical levels.

Towards a pedagogical return

Proclaiming what counts is an important first step towards reclaiming the common goods of education; it is also a means of achieving it through the everyday work of teaching and learning in our schools – in the daily encounters between a teacher and her pupils. It is in these daily pedagogical moments that there is an opening for thinking together about what counts, and for being willing to come before others and make our position known. This is not something that can be curricularised or laid out on a lesson plan. While “to proclaim” has connotations of something that is broadcast or heralded, Cavell notes that that it is also something much more ordinary – even intimate – and that in proclaiming, we can simply “remark something to someone” (1979, p. 35). Returning education to the common can happen through the most ordinary of opportunities that the teacher can open up for thinking beyond the strictures of what must be taught (or learned or assessed). This is not a case of initiating a radical rethink of curricula, or of returning to what has been deemed to have worked well in the past (or in other sectors) in order to foster improvements.¹² It is rather realised in everyday pedagogical practices whereby the teacher opens up the world to her pupils. Such practices are ones that are characterised by ways of being with pupils, and of talking with them, that contribute to the construction of the common goods of education (rather than merely securing narrowly conceived measures of achievement). Practically, this might begin with asking the kinds of questions whose focus is not merely on checking whether a pupil has an adequate grasp of the relevant subject knowledge (for example, of the stages of solving an equation in mathematics, of using correct punctuation in English, or of the stages involved in conducting a basic experiment in science). It is rather that the kinds of questions asked are radically open

¹² As an example, at the time of writing this paper, England’s Department (DfE) have announced that Latin (generally a subject now only taught in elite private schools) is to be taught at state schools across England in an effort to improve learning with other languages and subjects such as maths and English. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jul/31/latin-introduced-40-state-secondaries-england>. Accessed August 3rd 2021.

ones that, in the Cavellian sense, are invitations to passionate exchange. They are also profoundly philosophical questions that go to the heart of what it means to be a human being; what is at stake in being a member of the community; about the values we hold most dear; about what is worth knowing (and so, worth learning), and why it matters.

Such pedagogical approaches are not easily checked off a tick list of techniques that can be observed and noted as good practice in teacher observations. They are rather embodied values of the teacher herself, and the outworking of her commitment to being in relationship with her pupils. Reclaiming what is common is part of what it is to be in relationship with another as pupil or teacher. Again, this goes far beyond the expectations of the teacher in terms of behaviour management protocols for effective pupil progress and attainment, and what is enshrined in teacher standards about maintaining good relationships with pupils and exercising appropriate authority. It is an opening up of the world and the offer of an invitation to share in it. And it is about the teacher's own openness too. The relational is central here, because when we reclaim the common goods of teaching together, we do this through reckoning with others.

Towards a political (re)turn

When we say: "I reckon [something to be the case]", we are saying: "I hold this impression [of something]; how do you reckon it?" We are offering up not only a declaration of how we see the world, but also issuing an invitation to see if you hold it in common with me too. Reckoning together as a way of working out what counts for us as a means of claiming and reclaiming the common goods of education, goes beyond pedagogy. It must be inextricably woven throughout the practices of local and national leadership, governance and regulation. This is not to suggest a return to some kind of "golden age" of schooling – a harking back to certain pedagogical practices, curricula or approaches to leadership and organisation. It is rather a call for a mode of conversation that is a turning together (*con-vertere*). To engage in this kind of conversation – and to keep the conversation going by a commitment to ongoing forms of reckoning together – places significant responsibility on all those for whom education counts. To join such a conversation is, to use Cavell's

words, to “speak politically” (1979, p. 25). And for Cavell, the alternative to *not* speaking for yourself politically is not speaking privately; it is rather “having nothing (political) to say” (1979, p. 28). This is not a once-for-all-time conversation. It is part of a daily return of education to the common; a continual reckoning together of what counts, and a calling to account. Reckoning together in this way becomes one of the central missions of the school. But more than this, it becomes the mode by which we live together in community as members of the *polis* who take on the responsibility for education; for a kind of education that is realised in the multiple ways in which it is returned to the common through proclaiming – and reclaiming – its democratising promises.

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